

Entertaining the Environment: Towards an Ethics of Art events

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In the late 18th century the Abbé Nollet created entertainment by passing electric current from a Leyden Jar (an early battery prototype), through a line of 300 Carthusian monks holding hands, causing them to simultaneously jump in the air (Elsenaar and Scha 19). This was one of a series of early experiments exploring a fascination with this newly discovered force in the world, capable of passing through and rearranging bodies and objects. Such works demonstrate a shift in positioning the human and environment: an enthusiasm for an exploration of a distinctly non-human agency active in a lively world of forces and an entrancement with the capability of such forces to traverse and reorganise human body potential into a decidedly 'post-human collective body/assemblage' (Manning & Goodman 2).

In her recent writing and art production, Erin Manning has proposed two concepts, that of 'entraining' and 'entertaining' the environment (Manning & Goodman 6) as a way of thinking through the two perceptual categories proposed by process philosopher Alfred White Northhead: that of 'causal efficacy', and 'presentational immediacy' (310–21). 'Entrainment', Manning says, concerns the 'immanently relational intertwining of perception with action' (Manning & Goodman 6). (Her recent art works *Stitching Time* at the 2012 Sydney Biennale and *Weather Patterns* (2012), at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and Deakin University, Latrobe University VAC and Bus Projects, Melbourne, also experiment with this concept).

Isabelle Stengers explains causal efficacy as a construction of chains of cause and effect, often based on prior knowledge or habitual response to sense data (401)—a succinct description, though perhaps something of a simplification of the potential of causal efficacy, which might also more expansively be thought of as a 'lure' towards prehension, 'call[ing] forth new immanent associations and new assemblages' (*Always* 23). 'Entertainment', on the other hand, is indifferent to such concerns (Whitehead 324): it is the process by which an art event might 'place us immediately in a relational framework rather than investing in the hierarchy of subject and object', concentrating on 'the direct perception of the fielding of experience such that it brings its qualitative resonances to the fore' (Manning & Goodman 1). That is, it centres on the felt quality of the experience of the activities of the field organising itself rather than on the resulting objects or subjects. In this, despite the passivity that the term 'entertainment' might convey, it is resolutely concerned with the activities of the field or environment and the collective individuations of an event that might arise.

It is this potential for an emergent awareness of the processes by which causal efficacy folds into presentational immediacy to provide a sense of the 'witness of the body [as]

an ever present' (Whitehead 312) that I wish to examine through Lygia Clark's propositional art work *Caminhando* (1963). I want to propose that the work activates a felt resonance with environmental fields that is produced through processes of transduction, bringing also a new engagement with other entities in the environment and felt implication in a larger shared potential. This opening of the body to a wider field of sensitivities might then produce a suspension in-process, a moment of slippage out of habitual relations, evoking a sensation of being, as Manning says, 'always more than' a subject (*Always* passim).

In Manning's usage the 'environment'—which includes what remains of the human—is pure ecological process, an autopoietic system capable of self-modulation through the accommodation of internal difference and increased relational interdependence. This is in line with Felix Guattari's concept of 'ecosophy' (*Three* 34-36), a generalised ecology that 'questions the whole of subjectivity and capitalistic power formations' (52). As Manning says, 'to feel ecologically is to directly perceive the relations out of which space-time is composed. Perceiving environmentally does not imply giving meaning to form, but forming environmentally' (*Relationscapes* 73).

The question of how to think beyond the human, as Simon O'Sullivan states, is not as simple as a turning away from the human. Rather it is 'a kind of stretching or twisting [of the human], a rupturing and stammering, a releasing of forces from within and the contact of forces that are without (both in fact being the same operation)' (64), that is being considered here. This article attempts to 'think with' Manning's concept of entertaining the environment in order to unpack the experience of *Caminhando*, concentrating on its potential for the opening of the body to a wider field of agency, and for the production of a phasing, a moment of slippage, a crack in which to escape oneself.

I want to relate *Caminhando* to a concept of an ecological ethics in that the work addresses not the representation of relation but its immanent construction, and to argue that it is ethical in enabling an opening to further expression, connectivity, and an ability to affect and be affected (Simondon, cited in Combes 65). Ethics may seem a lot to burden such humble relational work with, however such aesthetic acts that extend and prolong contrasts might, as Massumi argues, be seen as an ethical politics in that they make felt 'different capacities for existence [and] different life potentials' and novel relational connections (Massumi & McKim 12).

From agency to transduction

To begin with, 'agency', it seems to me, is at best a problematic term, filled with nostalgic longing for transcendence. 'Agency' has a tendency to imply the primacy of 'agents'—discrete stable entities positively exerting force, while somehow in themselves remaining internally immune to change. Even those seeking to position agency beyond the human tend to think in those terms—actor network theory at its most programmatic, for example, or Andrew Pickering's language in *The mangle of practice* of 'resistance and accommodation' and the 'capturing' of agency (65, 92), staged as a kind of epic battle of wills between scientist and material world. As Karen Barad says, Pickering's

concept ‘takes for granted the humanist notion of agency as a property of individual entities’ (807, n.7). How then to think ontogenetically, to think agency as a more radical, primary force, shaping entities as well as the relation between them, not as a force to be distributed amongst entities as such, but co-emergent, making and in the making of entities: a ‘system of intensities’ that is the event (Livesey 338). How to think in the language of forces and the transformation of these forces as they move through entities is a question this article attempts to begin to address in relation to an art event.

In *Vibrant matter* Jane Bennett thinks of such forces as a ‘distributed agency’, a ‘swarm of vitality at play’ (31-2). After Gilbert Simondon we might also think of it as a process of transduction. Transduction, Simondon says, is a process by which we can understand individuation. Individuation ‘operates beneath all forms [and] is inseparable from a pure ground that it brings to the surface’ (Deleuze 152). It is an ongoing and in itself multiple process that underlies individualisation. Individuation is the ‘more than of becoming’ (Massumi, cited in Manning, *Always* xi)—becomings being dephasings of ongoing field-entity relations, singular expressions (differentiations) of larger ecologies of forces. Transduction then is the process by which such ‘an activity sets itself in motion’ at the same time as it generates ‘processes of modification’ (Simondon, *Genesis* 313). For Simondon it is a way of understanding and expressing the ongoing relation of a gathering of pre-individualised forces to an individualised entity that then exists as a ‘partial and relative resolution’ to these internal tensions (300), while still allowing potential for further change to remain open, a ‘charge of indeterminacy’ (Combes 47).

Transduction describes the integration of formerly disparate things within a concrete system, that is, the evolution of a shared associated milieu. It is, in simpler terms, how the becoming of an entity generates further unfoldings: how ‘formative force becomes form to become force again’ (Manning, *Always* 18), thought not as a linear progression but rather as a series of overlapping, always transforming, forces of differing viscosities, driving ongoing individuation. Whitehead similarly describes such a process as a system of concrescence and continuity: an entity, having achieved actualisation, becomes an ‘object’ for other entities, an ‘external resonance’, with its prehension initiating/conditioning their unfolding concrescence (235). Thus an entity has a relation both to every other actualised entity and to further potential of the system, by whatever degree of separation and whether prehended positively or negatively (239). That is, it is a dynamic point in a complex ecology of relations. In such a complex and intertwined system the transduction triggering prehension must be seen as more a vast nexus of complex forces rather than a simple cause and effect paradigm.

Caminhando (1963)

Make yourself a trailing: you take the band of paper wrapped around a book, you cut it open, you twist it, and you glue it back together so as to produce a Mobius strip. Then you take a pair of scissors, stick one point into the surface and cut continuously along the length of the strip . . . When you have gone the circuit of the strip, it’s up to you whether to cut to the left or to the right of the cut you’ve

already made. This idea of choice is capital. The special meaning of this experience is in the act of doing. (Lygia Clark 99)

Following *Caminhando's* instructions creates a body-tool-object machine producing movement—a ‘mechanics of expression rather than a signifying apparatus’ (Murphie 104), the work is per-formed rather than pre-formed. It opens up the potential for a process of collective individuation—a new event of assembling—between its component parts to occur, a drawing together through the force of shared movements between hands, eyes, scissors and so on. If art is an event, not an object, then this is never more obvious than in *Caminhando*. ‘At the outset, the *Trailing* is only a potentiality’, Clark says of her work (Bois & Clark 99). (Clark translates *Caminhando* as ‘Walking’ (in Suchan 2008), and as ‘Trailings’ (in Bois & Clark 1994)). The paper and the cutting are in themselves nothing, in the end the result is inconsequential and it leaves no real trace (Clark, cited in Suchan 6). The art exists as a moment of resonate intensity, of prehended phasing, its beauty lying in the delicate capacity to activate and foreground transduction.

Clearly Process Philosophy views transduction as a ubiquitous event, enabling the ‘drive towards novelty’ of the universe that Whitehead describes. What then, differentiates *Caminhando* from the everyday? In some way it is that it makes evident the process of the translation of these forces. But it is not exactly that it makes the process ‘conscious’ in any articulate manner. Rather it is that it makes the effects of transduction felt as it slows down the process of phasing, provokes a suspension in the flow, and makes evident the potentiality of the event, with opportunity for re-construction and invention, bringing a new attentiveness to the environment, not as other but as a collective gathering of a potential dynamic ecology.

Perform this work. No matter how much you know of it, how many times you enact it, it will still manage to turn you inside out. At the point where you have cut an entire loop of paper and are back to the beginning, instead of the scissors being next to the original incision, they are somehow on the other side. Sight contradicts expectation, hand/scissors contradict paper—the habitual perceptual schema is problematised, cohesion falls apart. The understanding of causal efficacy that the skin/hand sense datum leads one to expect fails to match the presentational immediacy. The link between the perceptual processes is felt through their failure to smoothly orchestrate. Any stable sense of fixed space instantly dissolves, briefly becoming purely relative to the movement: a sudden plunge into the depths of presentational immediacy.

Tentativeness

This is a jolt that shifts one out of habitual inattention, forces a new concentration on what is going on in the moment rather than preformed assumptions of relation. This sensation of disorientation might be experienced in the everyday when there is an unexpected loss or distortion of sense perception, such as being plunged into darkness, or a sudden loss or change of auditory conditions (the disorientating effects of echoes in a tunnel perhaps), or the tactile strangeness of one’s own mouth after dental anesthesia.

Such occurrences make the familiar world uncanny and force new combinations of sense information to be improvised with.

For example, for the sighted person, sudden darkness might trouble any sense of stability of objects and their relations and boundaries, and force a temporary fluidity and experimentation as a body cobbles together some kind of workable new 'organ' to make sense of the available data. In such a space, to those habitually reliant on sight to make quick spatial decisions, the whole body surface becomes a groping hand. Skin feels the edge of an object—as a resistant force—gains information but never really knows the object as a whole: an edge could as well be a table, bookcase, or doorway. Nerves respond only to the immediacy of the hard flatness, reinventing the object and body in relation at the next cautious groping forward. As Whitehead says, sense relations here become 'vague', losing spatial definition yet retaining and even amplifying the emotional tonality of the event (176). That is, causal efficacy becomes less distinct here, while the immediate sensory information (and its felt lack) is drawn to the fore.

What is most of interest here is the process of re-gathering and reconfiguration that follows such a shift, and it is on this that *Caminhando* focuses. Faced with a sudden loss of causal logic and a confusion of sensory data, completing the delicate task at hand requires a response to the immediate over habitual actions, and demands that the participant becomes attentive to the unfoldings of the event in the present. The situation encourages one to be immersed in the feeling of a (re)gathering of forces from the field. Navigating in such conditions a certain tentativeness naturally arises (as Arakawa and Gins might say (45)), as both cause and affect of a body rearranging, reaching out and in to: in that sensitive, quiet turning out of ears, skin, awareness towards the environment, slowly seeking to gather fragments of information from all angles and sources: to assemble from the field.

Such tentativeness might be thought as a slowed feeling-out of the future potential of the event, an immersion in its goings-on. Slowing down the shift from shaping to content allows a felt awareness of the pull of forces towards recomposition to arise (Manning, *Always* 189), some feeling of the ongoing transductions of the ecology. Here *Caminhando* problematises any sense of subjective control over the event as it begins to evoke tentativeness into a simple habitual cutting action. It requires of us that we gather what sense information we can, and backtrack from assumptions as we are asked to pay careful attention to what is being felt (and, indeed, to care more for what is being felt in the moment). In other words, it demands an attentive listening to how the forces of paper and scissors interact and conflate with forces in the hand, how their potentials begin to merge and interact, a sympathy with their own particular pulls and inclinations to become: an extended prehensive resonance with other entities (Whitehead 220).

The question for an art event that wishes to re-energise relations to the evolving field might be how this kind of tentativeness that evokes the momentum of future potential and its relation to the field might be made evident or brought to the fore. Here *Caminhando* enacts Manning's proposition: unlinking the processes of entertainment and entrainment (however briefly or incompletely) in order to become submerged in the flow of

individuation, of the gathering and transduction of forces from the field, the ‘no-time of the decision in the present passing’ (Manning, *Always* 106). And, if the ‘ethical task’ at hand is, as Bennet describes it, to ‘cultivate the ability to discern non-human vitality’, to become affectually open to the larger ecology (14), then it is in this concern with and increased attention and sensitivity towards emergent relation that such art might have a potential role to play in engaging us in ecologies.

The wisdom of rocks

In *Caminhando* affects pass through, initiate assemblages—new forms—instigating new forces. The arrangement of fibers in the paper, form tendencies to tear in this direction, resist in this way, that shapes the displacement of the force of the scissors. The kinesthetic tendencies of the scissoring action collect and direct the expressed pressure of muscle energies; the rhythm of vibrations of the cutting of paper is transduced by the ear and skin. The event requires attention to what the scissors, the fingers, and the paper feel, to what sensitivities form their worlds. It questions how their combined individuation, their folding into one another, their eventful assembl-*ing* creates, mixes and shapes their shared potential.

All things, Whitehead states, are capable of feelings (220), sensitivities that allow them to navigate, to form workable assemblages, to become with their environment: wasp and orchid, pen and hand, scissors and paper. Such ‘Whiteheadian’ feelings are not necessarily conscious, they do not privilege sentient over inanimate beings. Neither, as Manning states, is feeling ‘attached to a form already taken’ (*Always* 21), to preformed entities. Rather, think feeling as a force gathering towards form, immanent with the occasion, moving the event.

Accept Whitehead’s challenge; carry this to its limit—beyond entities with attributes easy to anthropomorphize (beyond animals, and beyond plants and trees even). Ask instead: What does a rock feel? To which forces are its sensitivities tuned—to rain, salts, wind, tides, heat? How does the becoming form of the rock instigate new force—shape the wind, give new direction to the current, absorb or dissolve salt solutions? See the rock-world relation anew: the rock’s continued fielding in the world (its continued effect on or transduction of the ecology’s forces), the field’s continuous expression through the force of the rock, rock-world as an ecology of operations. Learn from the ‘wisdom of rocks, from which we can derive an ethics involving the notion that, ultimately, we too are fluxes of matter and energy’ (DeLanda 143).

Caminhando asks that an increased affectual capacity be experimented with in order to navigate the instructions, a new tuning of the hand and eye to the conversation with forces in the paper, a new collectivity that expands their potential and expression. But more than this, it engages with not only what is perceptible to the participant and the extension of this, but also brings to the fore the dynamic negotiation between what is felt by all the components of the event, those feelings not immediately perceptible to us but nevertheless essential to the forming of the event (Manning & Goodman 1). That is, it foregrounds the dynamic exchange of force that unfolds the larger shared potentiality of

the combined machine they become. Here they begin to become trans-subjective in their evident ‘shared responsibility in events’ (Ettinger, cited in Bertelsen 32).

This in itself is a potential extension of interconnectedness with the larger ecology of the event, with the forces instigating the unfolding individuation flowing through the entities—the event of cutting and their intertwined affectual relations (their ability to feel)—that forms the assemblage, distributes the agency, not within objects per se, but in the event itself, making nonsense of any animate/inanimate divide. The ‘environment’ here is not some stage for a theatre of operations, but the field of forces resonating with entities. Perhaps here we might venture to say that rather than things having feelings or sensitivities to an environment, entities have types of forces that can pass through them, that can transduce them, activating phasings, and that an increase in affectual sensitivity is therefore an increase in involvement with a larger ecology.

Multiplicity

The *Caminhando* assemblage is more than a binary machine. It is more than multiple; the event is a multiplicity with its own logic, a concrete system of objects and field that exists in its entirety or not at all (Deleuze, *Conversations* 2). Such multiplicity lies in the gaps (cracks) between *molar* opposites: between hand/scissors, body/paper, subject/artwork—in the transduction, the movement of forces through simultaneous individuations that pull apart the molar, making sieves of its boundaries, and in the excess of ongoing further differentiation: its shared potentiality.

Such transduction integrates, as Simondon states, disparate realities into a system of relation (*Genesis* 315), which is a relation not only of the actual, but also the virtual. Multiplicities are irreducible: the sound of the ocean, wind, fog, flocking birds. The earth’s multiplicities, ‘nebulous set[s] . . . whose exact definition escapes us, and who’s local movements are beyond observation’ (Serres 103), that we are thrust into, or rather, born out of (already always re-phasing): growing like grass, Giles Deleuze says, in the middle, always from the middle of things (*Conversations* 23). Likewise, on the middle Massumi says ‘we become conscious of a situation always in its midst, already actively engaged in it. Our awareness is always of an already ongoing participation in an unfolding relation’ (*Parables* 231). Leaderless birds can collectively navigate so gracefully because their shared individuation brings into being not only the individual, but also its associated milieu, its pool of potentiality. That is, as Mitchell says, the ‘complete system in which the synthesis of the individual occurs’ (73). Subjects themselves are not communicating, but rather ‘regimes of individuation that meet’ (Debais 7).

Caminhando places us in the middle of the tension of events tending towards further becoming (always-in-process, a ‘more than’ reaching towards the next). Paper, scissors, skin each become dynamic points in a system, singular expressions implicated in the modulation of a shared multiplicity. This is the assemblage (which is also always the *assembl-ing*), trans-singular, more than its component parts, where cause and effect are lost in concrete inter-determined, co-causal birthing. The becoming-scissors of the hand, the becoming-paper of the scissors, or the becoming-cutting of all the components is their

shared potential—that indeterminacy that is the richness of the event. It is the pull of their future transduction back into forces that transforms not only the paper, but also the subject. To begin to feel part of such a gathering of future potential of forces might be a lure towards beginning to tend—to give attentive care—towards the qualities of how and what emerges, towards a shared responsibility in an ecology.

The power of the forming multiplicity here is that it takes us beyond the stalemate of the dichotomous, denouncing ‘simultaneously the One and the many, the limitation of the One by the many and the opposition of the many to the One’ (Deleuze 203). That is, *Caminhando* draws attention to our shared individuation with the ecology of the event, and that our individualisation is an expression in and of this individuation that neither halts nor contradicts the latter process. Rather it is a partial solution to an ongoing field of negotiations. Here it is made evident that you cannot have the individual without environment, that the two are points on a path of symbiotic enaction, individuation driven by transduction that is the becoming of the whole system, both the actual and the virtual with which it resonates. Assemblages in *Caminhando* create a shared ecology in the largest sense (a shared milieu or potential alongside a connected actuality), a system with ‘internal coherence’ (Simondon, *Mode* 40), because the enaction of the assemblage is co-causal with its field of potential: field and individual are a multiplicity.

Tactics

Lygia Clark says: *Caminhando* causes through participation the figure of the participant to ‘deterritorialize itself’ (cited in Martin 76). Deleuze and Guattari say: everything can have a microbrain (213), a topological system of forces for a nervous system. Arakawa and Madeline Gins say: we are organisms that ‘choose to person’; it is a routine of expected behaviors (1-5). Implicit in *Caminhando*’s instructions are challenges: choose something else; embrace your multiplicity, your connections with the world, the forces that exceed your body. Invent procedures, tactics to free yourself, learn to ‘swim’ in the tentativeness that is the ‘more than’ of bodying (Arakawa and Gins 84).

Arakawa’s and Gins’s work shows how bodying makes ‘landing sites’, mobile points of connection penetrating the world, dispersing the body and intertwining with environment. *Caminhando* is just such a technique to reach into the world, transducing the body into emergent assemblages, to spark new individuations. It is a procedure that gives rise to new microbrains: in the hands/scissors, in the ears/eyes/paper and so on. The art event is a machine that opens up a gap in the subject, that moment of felt phasing that creates a flight path: choose here, if you dare, not to person, but to embrace multiplicity, to accent individuation over personhood. Replace the frozen individual with the flows of forces, multiplicities of times; more a diagram-*ing* than a thing, with a dynamic relation to the virtual, ‘the combination of mutating fluxes, on their productions of speed’ (Deleuze & Parnet 88): become a biogram even: ‘play[ing] at the interstice of individuation and singularity, trembling on the resonant circuit of the virtual/actual now of pure experience . . . the body not as content but as a crystal or potential’ (Manning, *Always* 60).

Towards a new politics

Is this a ‘lively world’? Not in the sense of a separate environment with which to engage, but perhaps in the sense that it is an enactive worlding containing body-ings: individuations occurring always from and in the middle of other processes. The agencies that drive this, I am proposing, are best understood as the flow of forces and their transduction as they pass through and trigger the individuation of entities, integrating such individuations into an ecology of a concrete system as it also drives invention.

None of this is to say that the everyday does not contain subtle but strange occurrences when the body schema becomes momentarily confused—moments where causal efficacy and presentational immediacy fail to align—and the body has to scramble to reassemble itself, allowing a brief glimpse into the processes of exchange and emergence in individuations. But it is perhaps in *Caminhando*’s ability, despite the banality of the actions, to detach the event from the habitual inattention to transduction, to create in Massumi’s words a ‘semblance’ that such processes are drawn to the fore. Semblance, as Massumi uses the term, is ‘the manner in which the virtual actually appears’, that is, its felt ingression into the event (*Semblance* 15-16), its felt presence allowing a diagramming to take place, a thinking-feeling of the ‘dynamic form’ of relation and its connection to ongoing potentiality (15).

All this, I want to suggest, is perhaps a step towards a new politics of art. Clearly, this has nothing to do with the representation of an ‘issue’, but instead attempts to engage in the creation of lines of flight, with the composing of, as Brian Massumi says, techniques for inventing (new) potentials for existence (*Semblance* 14). It is *political* in that it ‘connects up different aspects of life’—new lines of causality and experience (O’Sullivan 74). This is an *ethical* art in Deleuze’s definition, in that it is a practice pursuing expression and connection rather than representation (Murphie 105). It is an *ecological* approach in that it activates an attentiveness to life and the field, to the conditions of the event expressing itself (Manning, *Always* 147-8), an ontogenetic ‘technicity’ for living. ‘Technicity’, as Manning describes it, moves beyond ‘technique’ to touch again with its potential or virtual, a ‘more than’ of technique (33).

Here the art event is an ecology-in-the-making: a body-becoming-environment, environment-becoming-body. It is ecologically sensitive in that it assists the formation of a trans-subjective attentiveness to an affective field across the becoming of space, time, bodies and objects (Bertelsen 39). Art events here, as Guattari states, can operate as ‘cells of resistance against the steamroller of capitalistic subjectivity’ (*Chaosmosis* 90-1), creating an ‘ecology of the virtual’ capable of engendering ‘conditions for the creation and development of unprecedented formations of subjectivity’ (91). *Caminhando*’s politics are those of the ‘micro-political’ as Bertelsen defines it, working at the level of bodily habits (43), and the event focuses attention on the felt continued emergence from which neither body nor field can be detached, the experience of a trans-human, lively world in the widest possible sense.

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